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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LAGOS 000575

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STATE FOR AF/W
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STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNOR OBI'S SUMMER OF OPTIMISM IN ANAMBRA STATE

REF: LAGOS 457

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Classified By: Acting Consul General Donald McConnell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: In a July 30 visit by Pol-econ chief to Anambra State, Governor Peter Obi optimistically believed with the court cases finally resolved in his favor, now was the time for Anambra State to be the "Light of the Nation". Political observers agree that Obi has an opening to transform the state, but speculated whether the dominant People's Democratic Party (PDP) would give Obi an unhindered hand in Anambra. The election tribunals in Anambra will likely go into the next year, with a decision hinging on whether the tribunal will accept the petitioners' contention there was no election in the state last April. End summary.

Visit to Governor Peter Obi

12. (U) Pol-econ chief visited Governor Obi in the Anambra State capital Awka on July 30. In Poloff's previous meeting with Obi in March, Obi appeared distracted, but had persevered in hope the Supreme Court would accept his interpretation of the constitution and grant him a four-year tenure till 2010. After Obi's victory, in a July meeting a now ebullient Obi expressed optimism that a bright future lay ahead. Obi told pol-econ chief his government had developed the Anambra State Integrated Development Strategy (ANDIS), and at the meeting Obi's aide distributed glossy flyers titled "Breaking the Jinx", highlighting his achievements since assuming the governorship in March 2006. Obi's staff also invited the press to attend a short briefing, and afterward press stories largely touted the visit as another confirmation of support for the Governor.

13. (U) The same commissioners in Obi's cabinet before the election had returned, as the commissioners of education,

information, and health attended the meeting. Obi referred to people as "Anambra's greatest resource", and averred his first priority was to change the people's mindset. He thought the ANDIS plan, with its emphasis on planning, budgeting, and resource allocation, would lead to greater transparency. Perhaps realizing his unique position as the only Governor to realize his mandate through the courts, Obi had recently changed the sobriquet of Anambra from "Home for All" to "Light of the Nation".

14. (C) Obi considered working with the recently-inaugurated PDP legislature a challenge, obliquely referring to "their different mindsets". Despite his standing as the only Governor from the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Obi did not see himself as having particular responsibilities to the party, though he told Pol-econ chief he believed in a multi-party system. Looking to the future, Obi foresaw freer and fairer elections, given the caveat that the election tribunals and the courts continued to follow the rule of law.

Visit to Anambra Legislators Finds Them in Intrigue

15. (C) In a meeting convened at State Assembly Speaker Anayo Anebe's office, Anambra legislators told Pol-econ chief while they would work with the Governor, they had prepared six bills themselves and were intent on passing them. The six-point agenda included, curiously enough, a provision providing for the hiring of private citizens to organize a security committee in order to "supplement" law enforcement. When pol-econ chief asked if this was to create a separate security force, the dissembling legislators flatly denied it.

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Anambra Reaches an Era of Uncertainty

16. (C) In a meeting with media political observers, correspondent for the Punch John Ameh opined that for now there was "momentary stability". People were genuinely taken aback when the Supreme Court ordered PDP Governor Andy Uba to vacate the Awka house, Ameh remarked, remarking that many Anambrans felt if Obasanjo had remained President, Uba would have been encouraged to stay. The court decision was accepted by the church, the Nigerian Bar Association, and civil society, but the PDP was still looking at the possibility of reviewing the Obi decision, Ameh claimed. Recent articles criticizing the Obi decision had appeared in newspapers, arguing the case should have gone to the electoral tribunal and the Supreme Court wrongly intervened. Though Ameh doubted the authority to challenge the Supreme Court, he also noted "people here believe in fighting to the finish and do not give up easily".

17. (C) Anayo Okoni, correspondent for the Daily Independent, said when Obi met with President Umaru Yar'Adua after the decision the President informed Obi as long as the rule of law was followed there would be no interference in Anambra. Okoni reflected that despite its friction with the Governor, the legislature was not considering impeaching Obi again. After the court decision, traditional rulers brought Obi and the newly-inaugurated legislators to try to avoid future problems. A more gloomy Ameh disagreed, noting the Anambra legislators were all "Uba's people" and had kept impeachment as an option.

18. (C) An optimistic Rex Eze of Radio Nigeria contended Anambrans were weary of the constant crises that had destabilized the state, and were willing to see what Obi could do. The legislators have their own problems, Eze postulated, since they all have cases in front of the tribunal contesting the April elections which "everyone knew

were not credible". Eze predicted there would be an agreement to allow a few seats to change in the electoral tribunal, which would improve Obi's position and help the Governor when he sought a second term. Politically, Eze analyzed the Action Congress and the All Nigeria People's Party on the sidelines in the state, with APGA strengthening, and the dominant PDP with plenty of loyalists but bereft of ideas. So far, Obi has been reluctant to lead or support APGA so for now the PDP remained the most powerful party. Obi's ANIDS plan would gain momentum, Eze predicted, as legislators would give their support to show their constituents what they had accomplished.

Onitsha's Chaos and MASSOB Taxes

¶9. (C) Ameh evaluated the Onitsha violence a result of not only politicians' meddling, but also idle youth working for the highest bidder in a city which he termed a combustible combination of various political and economic interests at the heart of the Southeast. Ameh considered the efforts of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) as peaceful but alleged MASSOB had been infiltrated by more violent elements. Nwanozike One of The Nation disagreed, saying MASSOB leaders were not behind the attempts to extort money but miscreants posing as MASSOB agents.

Lawyer Discusses the Anambra Tribunals

¶10. (C) Obele Chuka, a lawyer, human rights activist, and election observer for the Alliance of Credible Elections (ACE), gave Poloff his candid analysis of the Anambra election tribunals. Chuka represented several aggrieved

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petitioners, and told Poloff he had just arrived from the Anambra State Assembly, where he had chastised the legislators as impostors since none of them had won their election legitimately. As an election monitor, neither Chuka nor his fellow observers saw an election in Anambra state, and he considered all the results invalid. Uba, cognizant of the lesson of 2003 where Obi amassed evidence to prove he had won the election, was desperate not to permit evidence of an unfavorable result. In Anambra, the petitioners were trying to prove there was no election, so Chuka was collecting oaths posted by observers and voters willing to testify there was no vote held. The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) had to prove there was an election by providing a list of ad hoc staff and ballot papers, Chuka said, but this was so far proving difficult, as the Anambra INEC commissioner had absconded and still could not be reached.

¶11. (C) Despite the fact there was no election, the results in the tribunal would depend on each individual case, as some candidates did not have the finances to afford a petition, while others had been compromised by cash or a position to withdraw their petition, Chuka lamented. To ensure its victory, the PDP was spending massive amounts of federal and state money at the tribunals, alleged Chuka.

¶12. (C) Chuka charged that ever since Obi had won his mandate at the courts he had been disinterested in the election tribunals, and had declined to assist members of his own party. Chuka claimed Obi was actually trying to assist the previous state assembly, the one which impeached him, to extend their tenure. Obi found current state assembly filled with strong personalities and considered the old assembly pliable, mused Chuka. Chuka also told Poloff a rumor the State Assembly would impeach Obi at a propitious time. While Anambrans still supported Obi, it was not so much support for Obi as relief the Uba family had to relinquish power. In fact, people often preferred former Governor Chris Ngige to

Obi, remarked Chuka.

¶13. (C) Despite the difficulties, Chuka thought the election tribunal would overturn many of the decisions, though he estimated the process would prolong itself to January. To forestall action by the State Assembly, Chuka had filed a suit barring the body from passing legislation before the tribunals had made a decision. Assuming an overturn by the tribunal, Chuka argued new elections would be freer because of four reasons; one, Obasanjo was out of power; two, Uba was also gone, and would not spend resources for his candidates; three, the security services would interfere less since Uba was gone; and four, people would mobilize.

Comment

¶14. (C) Obi's court victory was popular in Anambra state, but the populace waits to see what Obi will do with his mandate. Obi appears to be in the strongest position politically since he assumed the governorship in 2006, although past history has shown popularity to be fleeting and often unimportant in Anambran politics. While Obi enjoys popular support, Anambra will be a study in whether the plans of a political newcomer like Obi can match the realities of hardball politics. Obi's success will likely be contingent on his ability to forge a successful coalition in the legislature, civil service, and security forces to implement his ambitious plans.

Biographical Notes on Governor Peter Obi

¶15. (C) Governor Peter Obi was born in July 1961 and is 46 years old. Obi was the former Chairman of Fidelity Bank, in which the Obi family still has financial interest. Contacts have reported that Obi has few close advisors and largely

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chooses to keep his own counsel. Obi won the 2003 vote but INEC declared Ngige the winner based on the machinations of Chris Uba, who later testified he had rigged the vote to persuade the courts to overturn Ngige's election. Obi became Governor in March 2006 and attempted to cultivate Obasanjo's support, but Obi had poor relations with the legislature and overall his tenure was disappointing. Obi's relations with the APGA party were also poor, as Obi was reportedly reluctant to support the party using largesse from state funds, a common practice for some other state governors. Obi was impeached in October 2006 on trumped up charges of corruption, but in February 2007, the High Court reinstated Obi as Governor.
MCCONNELL